



Recognizing a Centre of Excellence in Ontario's Colleges

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Introduction

The term "Centre of Excellence" is increasingly used by Ontario's colleges with the expectation of portraying a superior level of proficiency, expertise, or investment in a particular academic discipline or program cluster. This paper proposes that the term Centre of Excellence should have a clearer definition so that when one of Ontario's colleges uses it, the reader will have a better sense of its meaning by initiating a discussion as to how this definition might be framed from a measurement perspective. One reason why this is important is because, in recent years, colleges in Ontario have begun offering baccalaureate credentials, have added research to their academic activities, and have undertaken significant philanthropic initiatives. With these important changes, which have potentially far-reaching cultural and operational implications for Ontario's colleges, a new paradigm of measurement is emerging. The establishment of institutional research operations is evidence of college leadership's sense of the need to track their progress.

In limited instances, an identifiable program cluster (a series of related academic programs) will overlay success in traditional activities with high achievement in these newer college endeavors (degree programs, research and philanthropy). The program cluster reaches a sort of critical mass or event horizon after which a confluence of factors accelerates growth in a more exponential than linear trajectory. When this phenomenon occurs, and for reasons later discussed, the host college should consider such a program cluster as a strategic asset or "Centre of Excellence." In order to establish the emergence of such an asset, its performance should be measured against the performance of other college program clusters, both internally and externally, much the same as any other strategic asset. If Centres of Excellence are indeed strategic assets, organizations such as colleges and universities need to understand them as important differentiators and thus, a source of their competitive advantage. As Michael Porter says, it is not only what we do, but how we do it that creates a sustainable competitive advantage because how we do things is difficult to duplicate (Porter, 2012). When institutions better understand their competitive advantage, their resource allocation decisions are made more clear; a question of necessity in an environment of scarce resources.

In the case of universities, a Centre of Excellence can almost always be traced to the value and quality of research performed, usually measured by research outcomes such as publications, the dollar value of research performed, faculty awards and memberships in national academies, or other academic outputs. Thus, the second important reason to establish a more concise definition of a Centre of Excellence is that colleges' locus of control is different than universities and recognizing these differences may help colleges strive for objectives that are more closely aligned with their mandates and the objectives of their overseers.

The stimulation to move college thought toward a more concise definition is that they currently use the term "Centre of Excellence" for a variety of reasons. Even within individual colleges, different Faculties might use the term for entirely different reasons, some of which may trivialize its suggested import or reflect aspiration more than reality. Either within loosely defined categories or even at a conceptual level, few internal and no evident external measures have emerged that would help those who are interested recognize the existence of a Centre of Excellence. Should a framework of criteria become generally accepted among Ontario's colleges, those who would like to establish a Centre of Excellence will understand what to strive for. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to a discussion that might lead to the establishment of a set of criteria that more clearly describes a Centre of Excellence.

The mandate of Ontario's colleges is such that introducing new programs and the maintenance of existing programs requires direct guidance from the set of third-party organizations that are most likely to hire the graduates. These groups are called Program Advisory Committees (PACs). The provincial government will not provide its traditional subsidy to any college for a program that has not had the sanctioning of a PAC. One reason this mandate was built into the college system was to ensure that the education students receive remains applied and relevant thereby maximizing the probability that graduates will be hired. In addition, given that the PAC itself sanctions the programs, the probability that there is a relevant labour need in the sector is also improved. The PAC is the historic and most consistent focal point of the relationship between colleges and the relevant employment group.

In many ways, the relationship between employer groups and the colleges is symbiotic. Specifically, a more direct relational purpose exists between colleges and the associated employer groups than it does between universities and these groups. Indeed, many university programs do not have employer advisory groups whereas nearly all college programs do. The employer-college cycle can be described mechanically as employers informing colleges whether they should operate a program and what the outcomes of the program should be and, in turn, the colleges execute and deliver appropriately trained human resources. It is symbiotic because each needs the other to be successful. In the university environment, employee advisory groups are optional and, in many cases, might be seen as interference or even an infringement on academic freedom.

Most of Ontario's colleges were formed to provide vocational training. The term often used by today's colleges is "applied education." Features of applied education include experiential learning in laboratories, workshops or other simulation centres, practical on-the-job learning such as field placements or co-ops, and teachers who, ideally, have actual experience working in the associated sector. A majority of college teachers are not, nor do they aspire to be, traditional academics. While most college faculty have some level of postsecondary credential, only a small minority hold the terminal degree in their field. Ontario's colleges were never intended to be an alternative entrance route into university; they were meant to be an alternative educational stream entirely. To a great extent, Ontario's

postsecondary educational system is binary.

The traditional academic credentials offered by colleges in Ontario are two and three-year diplomas and apprenticeships. Lately there has been an increase in the number and breadth of two and three-semester certificate programs, one category of which is referred to as “graduate certificate.” Continuing education courses also train a large proportion of college students. Beginning in 2000 (Skolnik, 2001), colleges were granted the right to offer narrowly focused baccalaureate degrees. For example, students can earn a degree in Integrated Land Planning Technologies (Fanshawe), Exercise Science and Health Promotion (Sheridan) or Paralegal Studies (Humber). It is often the case that universities do not recognize these credentials when students want to transfer or continue into a masters program. As well, and despite uneven results from a financial, a student demand, and a graduate employment perspective, the number of baccalaureate programs offered at colleges has increased. Some colleges, Humber being a prime example, have adopted strategies to aggressively increase their degree programming.

Until just a few years ago, research in postsecondary institutions in Ontario was the exclusive purview of universities. The research agenda, especially in more research intensive universities such as the Universities of Toronto, Waterloo, Western, Queens and McMaster, is entrenched in the culture of the academic core as well as in institutional infrastructure. For example, teaching release for research is normal practice, tenure decisions are founded primarily in candidates’ research outputs, facilities and infrastructure readily enable research performance, and graduate education is, by its very nature, an important component of the research enterprise. Having said this, the nature of university-based research in Ontario is heavily oriented to basic and inquiry-based research and less to the highly applied and commercialization end of the research spectrum. In communion with their pedagogical orientation, the latter space is where colleges are tending to become engaged in their research efforts.

Around February 2004, the College Ontario Network for Industry Innovation (CONII) was established with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Research and Innovation. This funding enabled recipient colleges to establish or strengthen recently founded offices of applied research. While some Ontario colleges were performing research prior to this period, it was, in most cases, sporadic and generally unsustained. The CONII funding could be considered as a seminal moment for college-based research in Ontario since it was the first meaningful sanctioning for colleges by its primary funder and overseer (the Ontario Government), that they should pursue a research agenda as part of their strategy.

Even as they delve into the world of research, colleges face many obstacles, not the least of which is funding. There are suggestions that colleges will receive about one percent of the \$3.0 billion in government research funding for the higher education sector in 2013. This amount is expected to grow to three or four percent in the coming years. If research funding patterns match Canada’s historic norms, Ontario’s colleges will be eligible for about 25% of this amount. In the scheme of things, this does not add up to much. However, since colleges are advancing from nearly a standing start, this seems like enough to feed the current demand. The

expected growth, however, is an indicator of the expectations of college potential for research.

In addition to funding challenges, there is no history that colleges can use as a model for performing research. Infrastructure and policies need to be created. Furthermore, most faculty have never undertaken a formal research project and have no training in methodology. Only a few PhDs are interspersed through the colleges and there is no graduate education of any consequence. Also unlike universities, research has yet to find its way into the incentive system. Perhaps even more to the point, the full-time teaching assignment method does not accommodate research performance very well. Indeed, in some cases, research can be at odds with teaching. One school of thought about research is that it is best if it becomes part of the curriculum of a program. In this regard, research can serve as the capstone project work for students. At least anecdotally, this approach will help entrench research as an ongoing activity in the college. As well, in many colleges there is little physical space for research activities to be executed and a lack of the specific types of equipment that are often needed. Of course, there are financial implications to the research enterprise, the most important being that colleges may not yet fully recognize that research is a financial drain (offset by strategic value). Lastly, but certainly not least, the short duration of the student lifecycle can act as a deterrent for taking on long term projects.

Despite these challenges, colleges have great advantages over their university cousins, particularly in the applied research space. In some colleges and in some programs, the PAC relationships developed into much more than just a meeting or two per year for a high level review of program performance or content. Some PACs have achieved a high level of governance where direct formal and valuable advice is provided and follow up discussions help ensure that the college is executing in the direction of their guidance. Sometimes meetings occur with more frequency or subcommittees form to review and make recommendations on specific items, not unlike committees of corporate Boards of Directors. In addition, industry people are often called on an ad-hoc basis about questions that can pertain to any aspect of curriculum, equipment, pedagogy, or subject matter expertise.

In addition to advisory roles and, as skills shortages have arisen in some fields, more aggressive graduate recruitment has become evident, including participation in college run job fairs and on-campus recruitment, where direct appeals to students are possible. As earlier noted, in order to provide practical learning experiences for students as well as to provide employers a chance to “try out” potential new recruits, employers provide field placement and co-op opportunities for students. Interactions between Chairs, faculty, students and employers increase when industry members teach courses, guest lecture, or provide guidance, topics and attend exhibitions of student projects. These are the types of interactions that enable conversations between industry and the college to expand into new areas that include research project opportunities. This is especially true if the faculty are interested and capable of pursuing these types of arrangements.

While research projects also enter the college through research

offices, research itself is a new dimension in college-industry interactions and has the potential to impact on a wide range of cultural, operational, curricular, and financial aspects of the college. It deserves further observation and study. The pre-existing relationships that the college has, usually with the operational level people of the associated employer groups, and which were initially established through the PACs, is the competitive advantage that colleges have over universities in this type of research pursuit. The number and nature of these relationships can also be an important differentiator between colleges.

A third major addition to the college portfolio of initiatives is in the realm of philanthropy. Efforts to raise funds for scholarships and capital campaigns, comprising both cash and in-kind gifts, have increased substantially in recent years. The privately funded portion of capital expansion costs that are valued in the tens of millions of dollars is more and more common. Over time, philanthropic activities impact the institution in a variety of ways and places. Fundraising is highly entrepreneurial and time consuming. Deans, Chairs, and faculty may all become engaged in these efforts on a regular basis or unexpectedly and can test institutional commitments to the principles of academic integrity and independence. The success of philanthropic efforts is directly related to the calibre of a college's external relationships.

Measuring degree programming, research, and philanthropy in addition to the traditional college activities is a function already underway in most colleges. Keeping track of strategic assets has long been college practice; assets which are often reflected on financial statements. Intellectual property, of the type that a Centre of Excellence might comprise, has yet to appear in any objective measure on any college published material. If a Centre of Excellence is considered to be a strategic asset that provides a competitive advantage through programmatic differentiation, it should be appropriately recognized. The purpose of this paper is to provide a framework regarding the measures that can be used to identify whether a Centre of Excellence exists and how its status might be changing.

Definition of Centre of Excellence

For Ontario's colleges, a Centre of Excellence can be defined as a self-sustaining virtuous cycle that manifests the symbiotic relationship between the college and industry. A Centre of Excellence is an academic area that holds the leadership position, within its catchment area, in the minds and hearts of its students, faculty, managers, and external partners. It has a high and rising reputation, the halo effect of which reflects positively on the entire institution which, in turn, should increasingly treat it as a strategic asset. While being an integral part of its resident college, the Centre of Excellence enjoys increasing financial and operational independence and will exhibit best practices in many of its activities. Because a Centre of Excellence is the confluence of many positive reinforcing factors, several of which are new to the system, colleges will rarely have more than two. Many have none. A Centre of Excellence can be a major differentiator for a college. It can be featured in marketing and promotion and used for advocacy efforts. A Centre of Excellence is a reflection of leadership and quality, not only in the specific discipline but, at least in certain support functions such as marketing and facilities, in the

institution generally.

While some institutions say they have a Centre of Excellence in a particular discipline, these claims may not stand up to closer examination. If a Centre of Excellence is to be recognized within a specified set of criteria, it can only be identified by using objective measures; measures that are comparable across institutions and within them. This will help prevent an overly broad or trivializing use of the term.

Degree programs as indicators of a Centre of Excellence

Although not an absolute necessity, a Centre of Excellence will usually be assembled around a degree program that anchors a cluster of programs that are academically related. One reason for this phenomenon is that establishing a degree program is a far more rigorous process than is launching a diploma or certificate program. This allows more time to consider the employment prospects for graduates that can include an assessment of the capacity of the employer group and the employment rate of other competitive programs in the catchment area. A second reason is that the inclusion of doctoral credentialized faculty in the program delivery ensures that there is a core of formally trained researchers available. A third reason is that students are on campus for at least four years versus shorter durations in other college programs. As earlier noted, this increases the ability for faculty to take on projects that might span more than one or two semesters. A fourth reason is that the increased level of funding of degree programs (both tuition and government subsidy) enables certain types of alternative curriculum options that are less affordable in the diploma streams. These types of enrichments can include research oriented activities. Fifth, as the highest credential offered by colleges, graduates will have the most credibility and be in highest demand by employers. These factors may also encourage students from academically related programs, both within the college and from other institutions, to articulate into. Regarding this point, specific pathways into degree programs that are part of a Centre of Excellence should be well defined and extensive. Pathways to degree programs can help stimulate entering enrolment in diploma programs for those prepared to pursue five year degrees, produce graduates with sub-specialties (not unlike “majors” in the American university system), and help ensure robust enrolment in the degree program’s senior years.

In addition to a degree program being an ideal anchor for a Centre of Excellence, the program should be sufficiently large to be a significant source of employees for the associated employer group. The employer group itself must also be capable of supporting the program cluster from every point of view including being able to absorb the graduates from all similar programs in postgraduate institutions in the home college’s catchment area. Over time, this will enable the employers to compare the quality and employment preparedness of graduates between institutions, an important component of the overall image that members of the employer group have of the college’s desire and ability to serve them. Industry associations can also be important influencers in this regard. Holding top of mind awareness, which manifests in the Centre of Excellence program cluster’s graduates being in highest demand, is a strong indicator that an institution is winning a complex and ongoing reputational competition. It would be an exception for a Centre of Excellence to emerge in a program

cluster without high graduate employment rates. High student demand will, in part, be driven by the employment prospects of a robust industry while the reputation created by a high graduate employment rate of a particular program cluster will tend to drive student demand to an individual college.

From a college perspective, there are numerous possible measures that would indicate the vitality of a degree program; student demand, retention or completion rates, and graduate employment rates being some of the most basic. To emphasize the point, there can be the highest quality faculty and facilities, but if there are few students in the program and low demand for the available entering spots, the program will not be sustainable. In addition, if graduates are not getting jobs in their field, one important driver of student demand will be diminished. A leading reputation among employers and potential students underlies these measures. Marketing surveys can help establish a college's standing in a particular program area. If student demand and graduate employment rates are to be used to help establish the existence of a Centre of Excellence, they should be viewed longitudinally to determine whether the ratio of applicants to entering spots is changing. These measures should also be compared with student demand ratios in other programs in the college as well as with similar programs at other colleges and universities in the home college's catchment area.

Evaluating graduate employment rates can be impacted by many factors. The KPI survey is probably the most easily accessible set of measures although definitive conclusions drawn from these data should be viewed warily. As an alternative or for further validation, it may be useful to compare how aggressively the associated employers are competing for the graduates. Some examples of these sorts of indicators can include the number of employers that participate in college sponsored program-related job fairs and other similar activities, the number of employers that have arranged their own on-campus recruitment activities as well as the nature of the effort they make while on campus, or by supporting programmatic field placements and co-ops as a method of pre-screening hiring prospects. It is also possible, in certain cases, to attribute other employer-college interactions as a method that employers are using to raise their profile to both the college and the students. Membership in PACs and records of attendance at PAC meetings is one method. Guest lecturing and teaching also provides an opportunity for employers to promote their organizations directly to the students. Supplying equipment is a means of ensuring that students learn a particular method of operation which they may take with them into their next job. Scholarships and capital contributions are a very high profile way of demonstrating an employer's commitment to the college, for which there might be a tacit or explicit quid pro quo regarding access to graduates.

For reasons noted, degree program graduates tend to be in demand by the employer group in greater proportion than diploma graduates. In addition, for a degree program to be the anchor of a Centre of Excellence, it should be large enough to be a meaningful supplier of labour to the employer group and, at the same time, the employer group must be large enough to be able to compare the quality of graduates among competitive program clusters. In some circumstances, perhaps in colleges located in more remote areas, larger program clusters which do not offer a degree can serve to underpin Centres of Excellence.

Revenue as an indicator of a Centre of Excellence

A Centre of Excellence will always have robust student demand. As such, the tuition revenue will be maximized. If funding weights are also relatively high, then the government tuition subsidy will also be high. In a Centre of Excellence other revenues, usually in the form of capital contributions, scholarships and research, will also be earned. Capital oriented contributions can be donations, discounts, or both, for the acquisition of capital equipment or building improvements. Even though these types of contributions do not impact current operating finances, they do offset part, or all, of the requirement for the programs to support these investments over time. These types of contributions help ensure the programs remain current or can increase capacity as needed. In the case of the donation or discounting of program related consumables, current programmatic finances are positively impacted. In any event, capital oriented contributions have to be considered as program related revenue and as an indication that associated employee group members think enough about the program(s) to make the contribution as opposed to making it elsewhere or not at all. This is not to suggest that tax benefits are not also an incentive, but that donors can (and may also) support similar programs at other institutions. Among similar programs in its catchment area, the Centre of Excellence will be the greatest recipient of this type of largess.

Scholarships are a programmatic revenue stream only if the donor stipulates that the funds be used to support specific industry associated programs. Even though scholarships, whether expendable or endowed, do not impact on the financial performance of the program cluster (except perhaps by enabling more students to study in the program), directed scholarships are clearly an indicator of donor support for a specific type of program and should be counted as programmatic revenue for the purpose of determining whether a Centre of Excellence exists. If the scholarships are not specified, they should not be counted for this purpose.

There are three ways to count revenue generated by an endowment: (i) include only amounts awarded to students annually; (ii) count only the initial endowed gifts; or (iii) include both amounts in the year during which they were either received or awarded.

For the purposes of determining whether a Centre of Excellence has emerged, philanthropic support directed towards the programs and which originated from the associated employer group is a strong and important indicator. Philanthropic support can indicate that the recipient college has become strategically important to the employer. If numerous employers are providing philanthropic support in amounts disproportionately larger than that which they might be providing competitors, then it is increasingly apparent that this program cluster is important to the employer group generally and not only to a few key players.

Another revenue stream is direct financial contributions towards program and curriculum development. This can take the form of buying down college resources that are usually required to produce curriculum, in-kind contributions of subject matter expertise (other than PAC input), and even subsidizing travel to create partnerships or to observe best-in-class performers. This type of revenue is a good indicator that associated

industry members have a direct interest in developing programming in an institution they trust. As discussed elsewhere in this paper, research performance also creates revenue diversification.

The complicating factors surrounding the use of revenue diversification as an indicator of a Centre of Excellence is that finances are measured differently across Ontario's colleges and even within colleges. In addition, some industry groups are more public sector oriented and its members may not be in as good a position to provide financial support. Certain allied health professions would fit into this category. (However, given greater funding opportunities, higher levels of research revenue may be compensatory to health oriented programs.) Most other industry sectors and subsectors, whether they are IT, construction, finance, or sports marketing, have a substantial capacity to provide financial support to an associated suite of programs. Another complication arises in program clusters where graduates scatter across a wide array of industries such as business schools. How these clusters achieve the status of Centre of Excellence remains open to debate. Wharton and Harvard notwithstanding, this phenomenon might help explain why business schools in colleges (and in most universities for that matter) tend to be substantially undifferentiated.

The important financial questions that will help establish the existence of a Centre of Excellence are whether a significant proportion of the revenue of the program cluster is derived from non-tuition sources, whether that proportion is growing, and how it compares with the value and changes in non-tuition revenues for similar programs in the Centre's catchment area. While it is often difficult to make these types of comparisons directly, much can be learned by listening to supporters and donors who often provide a surprisingly clear picture of which institutions are their primary beneficiaries, and why.

The Faculty Role in Creating a Centre of Excellence

The faculty within a Centre of Excellence are its underpinning. There can be no Centre of Excellence without their fervent support, without a faculty core which strives for excellence in their teaching and other student interactions, and who have current industry-relevant technical expertise. Developing quantitative measures of faculty performance has been a challenge for Ontario's colleges. Anecdotally, it is generally accepted that faculty who give of themselves generously to students are more appreciated by both their students and managers. Whether this appreciation translates into higher completion rates and higher scores on KPI surveys or internal college student feedback questionnaires is difficult to say since results can be confounded by an array of extraneous factors. Other faculty recognition schemes have emerged and most are excellent although, in the final analysis, selections tend to be subjective. In the case of a faculty award selection committee for example, some members might put greater emphasis on student feedback, others are more interested in external validation such as achieving a consistently high standing in an intercollegiate competition, yet others might try to judge whether, and to what extent, a faculty member's actions have enhanced the college's reputation in some identifiable way. In addition, many faculty go unrecognized because colleagues have not forwarded their names for recognition. While faculty make important contributions to their college's on

a day-in and day-out basis that deserve celebration, measurement has proven difficult.

With specific reference to the recognition of a Centre of Excellence, an extensive network of external partnerships must form part of the faculty measuring criteria. There will be little externally sponsored research, less revenue diversification, fewer experiential learning opportunities, less subject matter expertise coming into the classroom, and fewer graduate employment opportunities, if the external relationship network is limited. Only with the direct and meaningful engagement of faculty in keeping external relationships fresh, meaningful, and growing in number, will the status of the Centre of Excellence be consolidated. Faculty engagement in their industry sector can be observed by their participatory membership in industry associations and advisory groups, contributions to trade journals as writers or editors, speaking at conferences, or whether they are current practitioners in their fields as contractors or consultants. In some cases, faculty may even sit on company advisory panels or Boards. While these sorts of non-teaching measures do not advance current thinking on college faculty recognition systems very far, they do help establish whether a Centre of Excellence has or is developing.

The argument for full-time faculty cannot be more strongly made when building a Centre of Excellence. The primary reason for this is that it usually takes many years for a Centre of Excellence to develop. Since college employees who tend to be more transient make long-term relationships with external partners far more tenuous, the employment of part-time teachers in a Centre of Excellence should be specifically to ensure the right level of subject matter expertise, to engage in pedagogical entrepreneurship, or to help broaden or deepen the number and quality of the Centre's external relationships.

Another factor concerning a Centre of Excellence is that it should revolve around a core group of faculty rather than just one or two key people. This condition has some important implications but the most important is that a Centre of Excellence must comprise a large student population with a cohort of graduates that is meaningful to the employer group. The core faculty group should comprise at least five or six full-time vocational faculty. When other full- and part-time vocational and non-vocational faculty are added to the teaching mix, it is easy to rationalize that a Centre of Excellence has to comprise a group of at least several hundred students.

While measuring the teaching quality of faculty remains difficult, certain measures related to determining the emergence of a Centre of Excellence are available. It does seem to be disappointing that the collection of measures intended to reveal faculty contribution to college operations do not equate to the importance of their contribution. Perhaps in time, as measurement sophistication improves, better insights will be available.

Research as an indicator of a Centre of Excellence

As earlier suggested, research activities can be an important component of the development of a Centre of Excellence. For example, since research cannot be done without faculty leadership, it is an indicator of faculty commitment to industry partnerships generally and to specific

members of the actual or potential employer group. Faculty who perform research are more current on industry trends since they have to be sufficiently knowledgeable about their profession to understand the reasons why certain questions warrant the allocation of priority resources and they have enough credibility with the industry research sponsor so that they can be trusted to find solutions to the problems. The virtuous cycle is that the more research a faculty performs, the more currency he or she is likely to have in their industry sector. Thus, faculty devotion to his or her academic discipline is both necessary and measurable. Furthermore, industry led research in colleges is reflective of the number and quality of trust relationships since college oriented research is as much a financial and business arrangement as it is an exploration. It is a partnership in the most real sense because the participants must have sufficient mutual benefit to counter the potential risk for the relationship to be sustainable. In general, if one research project is successful, there is a greater probability that more research will follow and that the nature of the research will be increasingly complex and higher value. In other words, as successful projects unfold, the college will become an increasingly important strategic participant in the employer group. It could be argued that the research relationship, among all of the college-industry relationships, is second only to the basic skills production-employment relationship in strategic importance to both parties. In no small measure, college research demonstrates a higher level of faculty commitment to the success of his or her students.

Research, especially when embedded in the curriculum, is an enrichment of the students' experience. Even when research projects are outside of the curriculum, they can serve as practicums insofar as participating students are often paid, interact with industry leaders, and are responsible for budgets, deadlines, presentations, and other real-world professional obligations. In addition, research helps students learn to work in teams, think critically and creatively, and is a positive addition to any resumé.

Research measures that can be used to determine whether it is sufficiently intense to justify the emergence of a Centre of Excellence include the number and value of externally sponsored projects, the number of companies involved and whether those relationships are new, high potential, or multi-faceted, the degree to which the research activity is aligned with academic curriculum, the number of students involved, the proportion of faculty involved and whether this activity relates to research activity in other departments in the college and similar departments in other colleges.

Concluding Remarks

Creating a Centre of Excellence in a college in Ontario can be an important method of enhancing reputation since it differentiates a college from other colleges and universities in its catchment area. As such, it is an important strategic asset. The purpose of this paper is to broaden the discussion about the casual and possible over trivialization of the use of the term "Centre of Excellence" by forwarding measures and categories of measures that will help determine whether such a condition has developed or is emerging.

As the discussion unfolds, it will be important to recognize the

significant impact that different disciplines and geography can have on how a Centre of Excellence is recognized. For example, a Centre of Excellence in some of the allied health professions might manifest differently than what describes a Centre of Excellence in certain media fields or the construction sector. As well, a Centre of Excellence in the mining sector in northern Ontario might express many different attributes than one in the ITC sector in Toronto. Other idiosyncrasies not discussed here may also arise within a more complete discussion. However, whether a Centre of Excellence is outstanding in its field in a measureable way should not be in question.

The relatively recent addition of research performance, degree offerings, and engagement in philanthropic pursuit, is causing Ontario colleges' locus of control and breadth of activity to evolve in new directions. Subsumed in the analysis presented in this paper is the notion that these changes have substantially improved college's ability to fulfill their primary mission but that executing these new directions require substantial resources. As such, executing on these activities involves strategic decisions. Furthermore, since launching degree programs, research performance, and engaging in the pursuit of philanthropic activities all require significant investment of resources, college managers have to decide which to pursue, the degree to which they will be pursued, and where in their colleges that they will be applied. Since a Centre of Excellence can be viewed as a confluence of investments in each of the recently added college activities, they represent a focal point of institutional investment. By definition, a Centre of Excellence is a strategic asset. They should be measured and managed accordingly.

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